

NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE

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[Lewis Dolinsky](#)

Friday, May 22, 1998

A HAT CAN WORK WONDERS

IN NORTH KOREA

Neither North Korea nor the United States is living up to the spirit of the understanding signed in 1994 as an alternative to war. The North shut down two nuclear reactors, and the United States agreed to supply a half-million tons of fuel yearly until it can have two (relatively harmless) light-water reactors completed in the North. But there are grievances on both sides, and recently North Korea threatened to unfreeze its nuclear plants. In this context, Peter Hayes, co-director of Berkeley's nonprofit Nautilus Institute, and three other engineers from the United States spent last week in North Korea, helping to construct a 100-foot wind tower in a 600-household village in Onch'on County, a rural area where farmland was inundated by a 25-foot tidal wave last year. To Hayes, an Australian who has studied, written about and visited the Koreas since the late 1970s, it was remarkable how three American engineers meshed with their 16 North Korean partners -- despite barriers of language, culture, fear and animosity -- and got the job done. All in five days.

Hayes says hats broke the tension. Everyone on the site, even the military police and farmers, wore blue baseball caps with "Nautilus" and "wind power" written in English and Korean. And at the end of a tough day, there were handshakes, smiles and fiery rice liquor.

The North Koreans adapted quickly, but they are used to working fast, without tools and under hazardous conditions. Hayes' first priority had to be safety. If anyone in his group were hurt, it would take a week to get out of the country; if any Koreans were hurt, confidence in the Americans, and in the project, would be destroyed.

After the binational teams raised the tower, they installed wind-measuring meters and microelectronic readout equipment. The Nautilus group will be back to help install a turbine, build six more towers and extend wire so that power will go to a kindergarten and a medical clinic, and

later to houses.

Part of the process is teaching fuel efficiency. The Nautilus project may be the first in keeping with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act passed by Congress in 1978, which authorized the export of renewable energy technology to encourage nations to give up nuclear weapons programs. Every detail had to be vetted by both governments. The cost (paid by the W. Alton Jones Foundation in Charlottesville, Va.) was \$250,000, including insurance, travel, food, hardware and good will. Sounds like a bargain.

Onch'on, poor but not starving, is a 1 1/2-hour drive from the capital, Pyongyang, and the route took Hayes past a port where international food aid arrives. He saw children waiting in the road for any bit of grain that might fall off a truck.

MAN WITH A KNIFE

A serial stabber is stalking the alleyways of Mea Shearim, the Jerusalem district where 20,000 ultra-Orthodox Jews live by the Torah, literally. The Torah says human life is sacred, and records show no murders in Mea Shearim's 124-year history. Until 51-year-old Kheiry Alkam died last week.

According to a report by Julian Borger in London's Guardian, Alkam and five other Arab workers have been attacked within a couple of hundred yards, all with commando knives left in them or near them. A survivor's description of the attacker fits the ultra-Orthodox -- hat, beard, dark clothes. Also young and strong.

A name inscribed on one of the knives suggests that the killer is seeking revenge for the death of a Jew. But to Mea Shearim's rabbis, the killer is a "din rodef," an outcast who can be surrendered to civil authority -- even though they don't recognize the Jewish state, and won't until the messiah appears. (By their lights, He hasn't.) They don't cooperate much with police; they take care of their own.

If this were fiction, the police would be stymied but a Hasidic "detective" would be on the case, sending vigilantes into the streets to find this "traitor." That's just what's happening.

THE CAPITAL IS CAPITAL

In December, Kazakstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev moved his capital from cosmopolitan Almaty, at the foot of majestic mountains, to drab, freezing Akmola on the wind-swept steppes. The idea was to get the seat of government away from China in the east and pre-empt any Russian challenge in the north, which is largely populated by ethnic Russians. But both citizens and foreigners have been reluctant to relocate to this barren place, whose name means "white tomb." Simple solution: Change the name.

Akmola, which was born Akmolinsk in 1832 and later became Tselinograd, is now Astana. Astana means capital. The capital of Kazakstan is Capital. The climate is the same, the surroundings are the same, but now the name won't be a constant joke. At least not the same joke. (Nazarbayev still insists that the correct translation of Akmola is "white blossoming.")

In the 1950s, a street in Manhattan was renamed Avenue of the Americas; most New Yorkers still

call it Sixth Avenue. Reuters reports that on the evening news announcing Nazarbayev's decree, the weather story on the capital called it Akmola.

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